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ABSTRACT

Developed at Missouri's Crowder College, the guidelines in this manual are designed to help educational institutions respond to and resolve crisis situations. Following an introduction describing the importance of having proactive commitments, resources, and routines in place to respond to crises, the first section provides general crisis support procedures, including obtaining commitment for a crisis policy from the Board of Education, developing a plan, and providing in-service training. The next section addresses procedures for dealing with the aftermath of a traumatic loss and includes the following sections: (1) general principles, such as directing efforts toward individual and collective grief resolution, notifying administrators if other family members attend or are employed within the district, and resuming normal activities as soon as possible; (2) addressing the crisis, including the importance of verifying all information with appropriate authorities/family members to avoid rumors, planning to have classes covered to release staff for counseling, designating one person to deal with media, and providing a crisis response team; (3) counseling guidelines, including the importance of using tact with respect to individual religious beliefs, using caution with physical contact in comforting students, and being aware of students who exhibit extreme emotions; and (4) following-up to the traumatic loss by gauging reactions to the event and the campus response. A sample prepared statement and a form for listing crisis contacts are appended. (HAA)

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# Crisis Response Support Procedures for Educational Institutions

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ED 402 977

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Any crisis (an untimely tragedy) which involves a school directly or indirectly, requires immediate attention. It is paramount to proactively have in place prior commitments, resources and routines to be implemented by those professionals who are in closest proximity to those influenced by the tragic occurrence.

Few seasoned school superintendents or other key academic administrators have been oriented to the underlying procedures and principles necessary for quick and substantive attention to: students, school personnel, families, and the community at large. Administrators unprepared for crises do not reflect uncaring or indifferent attitudes, just lack of dealings with these unfortunate circumstances. Many school personnel work years without ever being confronted by one of these unannounced and unwanted intrusions into the school environment. Nevertheless, they do occur. Consequently, this manual is intended to negate the possible harmful effects of unintentionally mismanaged crisis response efforts.

The guidelines contained in this procedural manual are the result of successful resolvement of crisis response situations. The guidelines are given in "bullet" fashion in order to accommodate quick assimilation and coverage at school "all staff" in-service days that typically have limited time constraints. Additionally, they are ideal in moment to moment crisis decision making. Although long explanations do not accompany the recommendations, they remain sound in practice and principle. Their intention is not to serve as the "Bible" of crisis response, but as an authoritative, condensed "road map" to resolvement when confronting an unexpected and sometimes overwhelming crisis situation. Few things can incapacitate a school district and strain or paralyze community -- educational relationships like an unsuccessfully resolved crisis response effort. So, in order to minimize potentially debilitating circumstances, these guidelines are set forth. I hope you will find them thorough, yet manageable in the unfortunate event of a crisis.

## CRISIS SUPPORT PROCEDURES

## (PRELIMINARY ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES)

- Gain commitment and adoption of a general policy from the board of education.

- In developing a plan, secure the cooperation and concern of all pertinent individuals that are necessary to provide the degree of control desired for your schools.

- While gaining your staff's cooperation, responsibility will be generated by establishing a sense of ownership through incorporating staff as an integral part of the plan through their suggestions, and past experience.

- Collect and review existing plans from other school districts.

- Update your plan as need arises.

- In-service training should be available for staff at the beginning of each school year on responding to a crisis.

## DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF A TRAUMATIC LOSS

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- First priority is directing efforts toward individual and collective grief resolution.

- Be protective of the family's privacy. Insure the family that the necessity of staff meetings, communication with media, verbalized announcements, the activating of a crisis response team, etc. will be carried out in a manner that will in no way undermine the family's privacy. Explain that all procedures will be discrete and respectful in regards to the family's desires.

- Individuals among the family should be determine who among themselves should be designated as the school's contact person. Boundaries concerning amounts of information as well as the extent of details to be released by school officials should be ascertained. Record what information can be divulged.

- If other siblings or family members attend or are employed within the school district, notify the administrator of the attendance center/building.

- Reduce the risk of additional traumatic loss (suicide, retaliation). Remove or facilitate special needs.

- School should resume to normal activities (asap).

- Avoid decisions which would function to romanticize or glamorize behaviors leading to additional crisis.

- To respond to students, help must first be given to the faculty who are in contact with students.

- Determine who will be in charge (in advance) in the event of a tragic occurrence. In addition, a substitute should be appointed. Roles of staff need to be ascertained.

- Availability of rooms for students to meet with counselors should be known in advance. Sufficient space for individual and group sessions should be provided.

- Availability of a conference room should be furnished for the adjourning of the team and staff.

## ADDRESSING THE CRISIS

- The appointed individual in charge (usually the principal or superintendent) needs to verify all information with the police or other appropriate officials/family. (Thus avoiding the rumor mill)

- Take note of any extenuating circumstance which might necessitate extraordinary intervention.

- In case of unusual circumstances, provisions with community resources/agencies should be readily available. Mental health center personnel etc.

- Upon verification, Crisis Response Team, counselors, school psychologist, nurse, and teachers should be notified. Each school will find it essential to have their own phone tree.

- An emergency staff meeting, prior to the arrival of students, should convene. The review of facts, establishing a common support base, announcing of procedures to follow throughout the day (which should be familiar if in-services were used).

- Additional copies of procedures should be on hand.

- Staff that may require special attention are those that: were particularly emotionally close to the deceased, who were recently disciplined, or through circumstances knew of suicidal tendencies.

- Plans to have classes covered in order to release staff to facilitate counseling should be in place.

- Crisis members can facilitate classes for teachers too distraught with the circumstances.

- All staff crisis members should be mindful to cultivate a climate conducive to open dialogue to process unfinished business in students' lives.

- The school officials should let it be known, in the prepared statement to students, that condolences have been expressed to family members.

- If available, appropriate items that assist crisis members to be sensitive to discussion about the person(s). Some of which are: photos, class schedules, information about extracurricular activities, family constellation, etc.

- One person should be designated, in addition to a backup designee, to field questions and interviews with the media. If media are allowed on the premises, (restrictions on the media are appropriate during school hours) it may be necessary to escort media personnel on and off the grounds.

- Have a prior understanding and established relationship with key media individuals concerning the objectives and special needs that a school district must cope with in such a tragedy. Express tactfully the parameters in which media will be confined to.

- It is highly desirable that students and staff alike be requested to refrain from releasing information or providing interviews to the media.

- Students who were especially close to the deceased: friends, girl/boy friend, should be informed privately and assured assistance from a crisis response/school counselor.

- A prepared statement to be read at the beginning of the first class, focusing on the facts, expressing condolences, encouraging open communication, dispelling speculation, and establishing a climate for individualized attention should be included.

- The prepared statement should not be announced over the public address system. The classroom setting provides a controlled, personal environment that is a more manageable climate for addressing students' feelings.

- Included in the announcement is an invitation to students for individual attention by a crisis response member or counselor/teacher.

- Be sure the students understand that they will be escorted to and from designated areas for counseling.

- Students will be informed at a later date concerning memorial services. Students should be encouraged not to call the family.

- Keep an open telephone line between the affected building site and the district office. This allows for additional personnel to be readily available. The superintendent can be advised at all times of current situations.

- Survey student files for data providing insights into other students who might be in imminent danger.

- Teachers with good rapport with students might be considered exempt from classes in order to help other staff/students deal with emotions.

- Suspend/intercept immediately all communiques to family and remove the deceased's name from all rosters including: athletic, disciplinary, testing, award banquets, scholarship, financial aid, and other mailings and notifications.

- Some classes or functions will need to be targeted as closer ties might have existed, i.e. debate/theater/athletic involvement.

- An administrator and response team member will remove the contents of the locker and arrangements will be made to transfer possessions to family.

## COUNSELING GUIDELINES

- Be tactful when approached by students inquiring about religious questions.

- Use caution when using physical contact in comforting a student.

- At all times convey an attitude of genuine concern.

- Avoid always offering up unnecessary details.

- Be flexible in the manner in which you deal with a variety of emotions and individuals.

- Be cognizant of students/staff exhibiting extreme emotions or an absence of emotions altogether.

- Should a student(s) be so overly distraught a team member should seek additional help from another team member. In the event that this is not sufficient, administration should be notified to gain parental permission to release the student through proper sign out procedures.

## FOLLOW-UP TO CRISES

- At the close of the day, the reactions and receptivity of students to the day's flow of events and interventions will help indicate whether additional intercession should be designated for the following morning.

## SAMPLE PREPARED STATEMENT TO BE READ TO STAFF

TO: YOUR STAFF
FROM: FHERDA CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM
DATE:

About midnight last night, (student name) was killed in an automobile accident. Apparently, there was an excessive amount of ice on the highway which made driving hazardous. An oncoming driver had fallen asleep at the wheel and consequently lost control of (his/her vehicle. The road conditions prevented (him/her) from maneuvering out of the path of the oncoming vehicle. The approaching car collided with (his/her) vehicle. (student name) was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident. Family members will advise school officials of the time of services.

[THIS STATEMENT IS TO BE READ TO FACULTY/STAFF. NO WRITTEN REPRODUCTION OF THIS STATEMENT SHOULD BE MADE TO STUDENTS.]

The individuals who will be present with us today are here to assist you. They are teachers and counselors from surrounding school districts. Any students who feel the need to talk, either individually or in a small group , may feel free to let their teacher know they desire assistance. Arrangements will be made for a teacher or counselor to meet with you.

ATTENDANCE CENTER: _____

BUILDING PRINCIPAL: _____

COUNSELORS: _____

_____

_____

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST: _____

SCHOOL NURSE: _____

TEACHERS: _____

SECRETARY: _____

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS: _____

_____

FHERDA RESPONSE TEAM MEMBERS: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GROUP COUNSELING CONTACTS

CRISIS RESPONSE MEMBERS: _____

_____

_____

_____

BUILDING: _____

TIME: _____ PLACE: _____

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED: _____

_____

_____

STUDENTS PRESENT: _____

_____

_____

_____

(PLEASE LIMIT TO SIX)

COUNSELING CONTACTS WITH INDIVIDUALS

CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM MEMBER _____

| DATE | TIME | NAME | ASSISTANCE |
|---|---|---|---|
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